

**Dear Readers of ALTEX,**

we were very sorry to hear the recent news that Thomas Hartung must give up his position as Head of ECVAM on the 1st of May. This is a great disappointment to all of us, who have worked closely with him and admire his success of the past five years in the challenging environment of the European Commission. We are publishing his letter, dated 8th of April, in which he briefly summarises the achievements of the team of 60 colleagues at ECVAM under his leadership in the past 5 ½ years. Apart from the uncertainty of Thomas' future, ECVAM itself is facing very difficult times, since it must meet the challenges of the EU cosmetics and chemicals regulations, which call for a replacement of safety testing in animals by alternative, non-animal methods. The editorial staff of *ALTEX* hopes that Thomas will overcome the current frustrations and that he will continue to contribute at the forefront of replacing testing in animals with non-animal alternatives.

We are fortunate that Thomas Hartung, despite these recent developments, this time together with Marcel Leist, is publishing another article of the series „Food for thought...” in this issue, which focuses on a shift of a fundamental paradigm in toxicology, which as a science will no longer rely on animal experiments but on the modern methods of molecular biology. The same authors, together with Pierluigi Nicotera from the MRC Toxicology Unit in Leicester, explain this new concept of toxicology in detail in their article „The dawning of a new age of toxicology”. This concept is not just “wishful thinking” of idealistic authors, but is based on a decision of the major US research funding agencies earlier this year, which is challenging from a scientific, financial and ethical perspective and in which Europe should actively participate.

Further, Reinhard Wanner and Maximilian Schreiner from Berlin describe a new and simple test using human cells to predict the sensitising potential of test materials, which already drew much attention at the congress in Linz 2007. Cornelia Heindl and her colleagues from Erlangen review advanced, non-invasive imaging techniques, which will reduce the distress of test animals. The methods, which have been successfully

established as diagnostic tools in clinical medicine – MRT, PET und OI –, will allow the study of complex organ function in animals. Roman Kolar and Brigitte Rusche from the Akademie für Tierschutz in Neubiberg evaluate the animal feeding studies that are currently being conducted to establish the safety of genetically modified plants used as food for humans and farm animals from an ethical perspective. The authors argue that, owing to the low interspecies predictability, the results obtained in such studies have only very limited value for assessing the risk to humans.

In addition to the main articles you will find a considerable number of short communications covering aspects of animal welfare for experimental animals. You may, for example, be interested in the new search engine for alternative methods on the Internet, “www.Go3R.org”, which has been developed by the “transinsight” company at the TU Dresden and funded by the BfR/ZEBET.

In addition, you will find information on a considerable number of funding projects in the field of 3Rs, e.g. on the current programmes sponsored by the German States Hessen and Rheinland-Pfalz and also on the Ursula M. Händel Prize of the German Research Council.

We cordially invite you to the annual congress on alternatives to animal experiments in Linz in September (LINZ-2008) and include a list of the upcoming international congresses on alternatives in 2008 and 2009.

The editorial staff of *ALTEX* hopes that you will enjoy the current issue and is looking forward to receiving contributions from you in the form of articles, comments or information on “breaking news” in the field of the 3Rs.

Horst Spielmann on behalf of the *ALTEX* editorial staff